

To the Honorable Delegate Feldmark, Members of the Ways and Means Committee, and House members,

I am writing to you with concerns surrounding the Blueprint and the exclusion of Literacy Teachers. I am currently in the position of Literacy Teacher in Anne Arundel County and have been for 13 years. In 2009, I achieved my National Board Certification in Early and Middle Childhood Literacy and in 2019, I recertified for 10 more years. I have been very active at the local level trying to plead our case for why we should be included in this enhancement. I have done public testimonies in front of the school board and county council, along with meeting with TAAAC, our union, the superintendent, and various local political figures, and have gotten nowhere.

When I was first informed by our local HR that my position was excluded, I thought there must be a misunderstanding. The rationale behind this, as you probably are well aware, was that our job description was not written accurately and does not have responsibilities with students listed to reflect what we are actually doing in the schoolhouse. Everyone in my position works with struggling students to provide interventions, co-teaches daily, and models in the classrooms. This is well over 60% of my day. These interventions also require me to monitor student progress and assess students, making me a teacher of record, further meeting the requirements of "teacher" as written in the Blueprint.

I am not in a Title 1 school; therefore, we do not have access to all of the resources that Title 1 schools are able to acquire. In schools like mine, I am one of the only positions that can deliver interventions to our most fragile students. This also has a trickle effect when we suspect a student has a learning disability because the first question the school psychologist and team members ask is, "What is their intervention history?" Without my position, there would not be an intervention history and students who need to qualify for special education services would be at a standstill, as this is a key part of the process. In my testimony to the school board three weeks ago, I asked them the question, "If I am not receiving the enhancement because I am not supposed to be working with students and I am not a teacher of record, then why am I doing it and not receiving the enhancement?" Can you imagine sitting down with a parent of a struggling reader and saying, well my job description is written inaccurately and I am not receiving the enhancement, so I don't know who is going to deliver the intervention to your child? I am in the business of helping children, but it is unfair to be doing so much and to have worked so hard to achieve an NBC certification and not be recognized and compensated fairly.

At this point, there is no incentive to stay in our positions. When I think long term, this is deeply concerning for schools, as we are the leaders alongside the principals in our buildings. This is, in fact, why I achieved NBC in the first place - to be a distinguished leader and a master of my craft (literacy specialist). So many of my fellow literacy teachers, who are NBC, have left this position to go back to the classroom. While I know this is what the Kirwan Commission wanted, who is going to take the lead in our buildings to push the Science of Reading forward for our students and teachers when all of the highly qualified literacy teachers have left this position?

I know you have done a great deal of work surrounding the Science Of Reading and for this, I commend you and your efforts to make this much-needed change. I write to you today in hopes that you can advocate for the language of the Blueprint to include the Literacy Teachers, in all buildings, who are working with our most fragile and in some instances, providing acceleration for those at the other end of the spectrum who have special needs of their own. As you know, positions like mine are critical to roll out a successful implementation of the Science Of Reading in our buildings. I understand that other reading teachers, literacy teachers, interventionists, etc. in other counties are receiving the enhancement, which is not equitable for all. There are also discrepancies between COMAR and the Blueprint and their definitions that define a teacher. How can we be a teacher according to COMAR and not a teacher according to the Blueprint?

In closing, I sought out to be an NBCT because I believe in their core values and wanted to become a reflective practitioner, move to the next level in my career as a leader, and be a change maker outside of the regular classroom, and now I am being punished for it. I am on the same pay scale as a regular Unit 1 teacher and I am meeting the requirements of the Blueprint. I have never felt so undervalued in my 19 years as an educator. Please help us right this wrong and correct the inequities in the language of the Blueprint. Thank you for all of your hard work and for taking the time to understand how important this is for educators in this situation.

Sincerely,

Lauren Long, NBCT, M.A.Ed.